

USS Liberty Veterans Association



Captain William L. McGonagle (1925-1999)



ON JUNE 8, 1967, while patrolling in international waters in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, USS *Liberty* (AGTR-5) was savagely attacked without warning or justification by air and naval forces of the state of Israel. Of a crew of 294 officers and men (including three civilians), the ship suffered thirty four (34) killed in action and one hundred seventy three (173) wounded in action. The ship itself, a Forty Million (\$40,000,000) Dollar state of the art signals intelligence (SIGINT) platform, was so badly damaged that it never sailed on an operational mission again and was sold in 1970 for \$101,666.66 as scrap.

At 1400 hours, while approximately about 17 nautical miles off the northern Sinai coast and about 25 nautical miles northwest of El Arish, USS *Liberty*'s crew observed three surface radar contacts closing with their position at high speed. A few moments later, the bridge radar crew observed high speed aircraft passing over the surface returns on the same heading. Within a few short moments, and without any warning, Israeli fighter aircraft launched a rocket attack on USS *Liberty*. The aircraft made repeated firing passes, attacking USS *Liberty* with rockets and their internal cannons. After the first flight of fighter aircraft had exhausted their ordnance, subsequent flights of Israeli fighter aircraft continued to prosecute the attack with rockets, cannon fire, and napalm.

During the air attack, USS *Liberty*'s crew had difficulty contacting Sixth Fleet to request assistance due to intense communications jamming. The initial targets on the ship were the command bridge, communications antennas, and the four .50 caliber machine guns, placed on the ship to repel boarders. After the Israeli fighter aircraft completed their attacks, three Israeli torpedo boats arrived and began a surface attack about 35 minutes after the start of the air attack. The torpedo boats launched a total of five torpedoes, one

of which struck the side of USS *Liberty*, opposite the ship's research spaces. Twenty-five Americans, in addition to the nine who had been killed in the earlier air attacks, were killed as a result of this explosion.

Sixth Fleet Abandons USS Liberty Under Fire. DoD Approves Of Their Action



The Department of Defense Law of War Program ([DoD Directive 2311.01E](#) – formerly DoD Directive 5100.77) provides that “All reportable incidents committed by or against U.S. personnel, enemy persons, or any other individual are reported promptly, investigated thoroughly, and, where appropriate, remedied by corrective action.”

On June 8, 2005 the USS Liberty Veterans Association submitted [A Report of War Crimes Committed Against the USS Liberty, June 8, 1967](#) to the Department of Defense in accordance with the DoD Law of War Program.

The War Crimes Report we filed lists allegations of acts committed during the attack on our ship, including:

- The jamming of our radios on both US Navy tactical and international maritime distress frequencies;
- The use of unmarked aircraft by the forces attacking the USS Liberty;
- The deliberate machine gunning of life rafts we had dropped over the side in anticipation of abandoning ship; and
- The recall of two flights of rescue aircraft that had been launched from Sixth Fleet aircraft carriers. After those flights were recalled, Sixth Fleet personnel listened to our calls for help as the attack continued knowing they were forbidden to come to our assistance.

The Department of Defense has unilaterally waived its obligation under the Department of Defense Law of War Program by refusing to investigate the allegations contained in the War Crimes Report. The Department of Defense has also refused to provide a speaker to address the crew of the USS Liberty and explain their actions with regard to the War Crimes Report.